

## The Back Channel

### India and Pakistan's secret Kashmir talks

By Steve Coll, New America Foundation  
The New Yorker | March 2, 2009

Two years ago, Pervez Musharraf, who was then Pakistan's President and Army chief, summoned his most senior generals and two Foreign Ministry officials to a series of meetings at his military office in Rawalpindi. There, they reviewed the progress of a secret, sensitive negotiation with India, known to its participants as "the back channel." For several years, special envoys from Pakistan and India had been holding talks in hotel rooms in Bangkok, Dubai, and London. Musharraf and Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, had encouraged the negotiators to seek what some involved called a "paradigm shift" in relations between the two nations.

The agenda included a search for an end to the long fight over Kashmir, a contest that is often described by Western military analysts as a potential trigger for atomic war. (India first tested a nuclear weapon in 1974, and Pakistan did so in 1998.) Since achieving independence, in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars and countless skirmishes across Kashmir's mountain passes. The largest part of the territory is occupied by India, and Pakistanis have long rallied around the cause of liberating it. The two principal envoys-- for Pakistan, a college classmate of Musharraf's named Tariq Aziz, and, for India, a Russia specialist named Satinder Lambah--were developing what diplomats refer to as a "non-paper" on Kashmir, a text without names or signatures which can serve as a deniable but detailed basis for a deal.

At the Rawalpindi meetings, Musharraf drew his generals into a debate about the fundamental definition of Pakistan's national security. "It was no longer fashionable to think in some of the old terms," Khurshid Kasuri, who was then Foreign Minister, and who attended the sessions, recalled. "Pakistan had become a nuclear power. War was no longer an option for either side." Kasuri said to the generals that only by diplomacy could they achieve their goals in Kashmir. He told them, he recalled, "Put your hand here--on your heart-- and tell me that Kashmir will gain freedom" without such a negotiation with India.

The generals at the table accepted this view, Kasuri said. They "trusted Musharraf," he continued. "Their *raison d'être* is not permanent enmity with India. Their *raison d'être* is Pakistan's permanent security. And what is security? Safety of our borders and our economic development."

By early 2007, the back-channel talks on Kashmir had become "so advanced that we'd come to semicolons," Kasuri recalled. A senior Indian official who was involved agreed. "It was huge--I think it would have changed the basic nature of the problem," he told me. "You would have then had the freedom to remake Indo-Pakistani relations." Aziz and Lambah were negotiating the details for a visit to Pakistan by the Indian Prime Minister during which, they hoped, the principles underlying the Kashmir agreement would be announced and talks aimed at implementation would be inaugurated. One quarrel, over a waterway known as Sir Creek, would be formally settled.

Neither government, however, had done much to prepare its public for a breakthrough. In the spring of 2007, a military aide in Musharraf's office contacted a senior civilian official to ask how politicians, the media, and the public might react. "We think we're close to a deal," Musharraf's aide said, as this official recalled it. "Do you think we can sell it?"

Regrettably, the time did not look ripe, this official recalled answering. In early March, Musharraf had invoked his near-dictatorial powers to fire the chief justice of the country's highest court. That decision set off rock-tossing protests by lawyers and political activists. The General's popularity seemed to be eroding by the day; he had seized power in a coup in 1999, and had enjoyed public support for several years, but now he was approaching "the point where he couldn't sell himself," the official remembers saying, never mind a surprise peace agreement with India.

Kasuri was among the Musharraf advisers who felt that the Pakistanis should postpone the summit--that they "should not waste" the negotiated draft agreements by revealing them when Musharraf might not be able to forge a national consensus. Even if it became necessary to hold off for months or years, Kasuri believed, "We had done so much work that it will not be lost."

Pakistan's government sent a message to India: Manmohan Singh's visit should be delayed so that Musharraf could regain his political balance. India, too, was facing domestic complications, in the form of regional elections. In New Delhi, the word in national-security circles had been that "any day we're going to have an agreement on Kashmir," Gurmeet Kanwal, a retired Indian brigadier, recalled. "But Musharraf lost his constituencies."

Rather than recovering, the General slipped into a political death spiral. Armed Islamist radicals took control of the Red Mosque, in Islamabad, and, in July, Musharraf ordered a commando raid to expel them. Sensing a political opening, the country's two most popular civilian politicians, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, whom Musharraf had forced into exile, agitated to be allowed to return. By year's end, public pressure had forced Musharraf to give up his Army command. A suicide bomber murdered Bhutto in a public park just a month later. Her widower, Asif Zardari, led their political party to victory in an election in which voters repudiated Musharraf and his political allies. In August, 2008, Musharraf resigned and retired from public life.

In the sixty-one years of their existence, the governments of India and Pakistan have periodically funded covert campaigns of guerrilla or terrorist violence on each other's soil; as a result, each now holds unshakable assumptions about the other's proclivity for dirty tricks. In Pakistan, for example, it is an article of faith among many senior Army officers that India's foreign-intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing, or R.A.W., is providing guns and money to ethnic Baluch and Pashtun groups that operate along the Afghan border, and who seek to separate from or overthrow the Pakistani government. Equally, in India's cabinet and parliament, it is taken for granted that the Pakistan Army leadership provides aid to jihadi groups so that they can carry out terrorist attacks on Indian soil--the latest example being the band of ten young men who arrived in an inflatable dinghy at Mumbai's Badwar Park last November 26th.

The Mumbai attackers carried G.P.S. navigational equipment, a satellite telephone, cell phones suitable for local Mumbai networks, grenades, Kalashnikovs, and 9-millimetre pistols, which they employed to kill a hundred and sixty-five people, including six Americans, during a three-day spree of nihilistic violence. More than most cells that have turned up in India in recent years, the terrorists had production values that seemed inspired by the September 11th attacks: they struck at multiple sites in the heart of India's financial district and exploited live television and radio coverage.

Indian security services managed to intercept the attackers' telephone calls, and discovered that they were speaking to handlers in Pakistan. The Indians assembled a dossier, containing excerpts of these conversations, translated into English, which they presented to Pakistan, the United States, and other governments; one version ran to a hundred and eighteen pages. In one intercept, the terrorists rejoice because television anchors are comparing their work to 9/11. In tone and rhythm, the excerpts suggest something of the banality of cellphone-enabled mass murder:

Caller: Let me talk to Umar.

Receiver: Note a number. Number is 0043720880764.

Caller: Whose number is this?

Receiver: It is mine. The phone is with me.

Caller: ... Allah is helping you.... Try to set the place on fire.

Receiver: We have set fire in four rooms.

Caller: People shall run helter skelter when they see the flames. Keep throwing a grenade every fifteen minutes or so. It will terrorize. Here, talk to "Baba."

Caller (2): A lot of policemen and Navy personnel have covered the entire area. Be brave!

The dossier leaves little doubt that the attack originated in Pakistan: a man using a Pakistani passport paid for the terrorists' phone services; their pistols were engraved with a manufacturer's address in Peshawar; and numerous provisions recovered from a fishing trawler that the group used to reach Mumbai from Karachi were made in Pakistan.

More specifically, the Indian government's dossier concludes that the Mumbai attack was coordinated by Lashkare-Taiba, or the Army of the Pure—a Pakistan-based, Saudi-influenced Islamist terrorist

and guerrilla force that fights mainly in Kashmir. A decade ago, Lashkar's emir, Hafiz Saeed, announced his intention to destroy India: "We will not rest until the whole [of ] India is dissolved into Pakistan." After the Mumbai attack, Saeed delivered a public sermon in Lahore in which he spoke approvingly of a new "awakening" among Indian Muslims, and described his coreligionists as "second to none in taking revenge." A satellite-telephone conversation between one of the Mumbai terrorists and a supervisor in Pakistan, intercepted independently by the United States, also points to Lashkar's involvement in the raid.

After many weeks of prevarication, Pakistani officials conceded that the Mumbai attackers appear to have come from their country. Pakistan has detained and filed criminal charges against at least one senior Lashkar commander named in the Indian dossier. But it remains unclear how far Pakistan will go to dismantle Lashkar. Since the early nineteen-nineties, Pakistan's principal military-intelligence service, Inter-Services Intelligence, or I.S.I., has armed and funded Lashkar to foment upheaval in Indian-held Kashmir. Although many of Pakistan's generals are secular or apolitically religious, they have sponsored jihadis as a low-cost means of keeping India off balance.

The historical ties between Lashkar and the Pakistani security services are for the most part undisputed; one book that describes them, published in 2005 and entitled "Between Mosque and Military," was written by Husain Haqqani, who is currently Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States. However, Brigadier Nazir Butt, a defense attaché at the Embassy in Washington, denied that his government had provided lethal aid to Lashkar or to other violent groups. "Pakistan only extended moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination," he said. "After 9/11, Pakistan withdrew all its support for Kashmiri organizations and, as a consequence, drew violent attacks on its military and national leadership."

American officials, who rely upon the I.S.I.'s cooperation in their campaigns against Al Qaeda and the Taliban along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, continue to say that there is no evidence that active I.S.I. personnel participated in or knew in advance about the Mumbai strike. Yet critical evidence, such as interrogations conducted in Pakistan, is effectively under I.S.I. control; agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has jurisdiction in the matter under U.S. law, because American citizens were among the victims, have been denied direct access to the Lashkar suspects.

It's also true that Pakistan's government has itself been on the receiving end of jihadi attacks in the past year. "It's not as if all this stuff is external and going into India," one official from a nato government said. "They don't have the capacity to defend Islamabad and Peshawar. They're losing ground." Taliban-led insurgents today control large swaths of territory in Pakistan's northwest, where they enforce a brutal regime of Islamic justice, and recently signed a truce with the government in the Swat valley. They have mounted a bombing campaign that has reached Islamabad; some of the bombs have been aimed at the Army and the I.S.I., suggesting a loss of control by the I.S.I. over its jihadi clients, or a split within the Pakistani security services, or both.

In January, Prime Minister Singh remarked that the Mumbai attack could not have been carried out without "the support of some official agencies in Pakistan." India nevertheless reacted to the attack with relative restraint. Singh's government has not ordered a major military mobilization, nor has it launched any retaliatory strikes against Pakistan. Were it not for the back-channel talks, the response might not have been so measured: Singh and at least some of his civilian counterparts in Pakistan hope to find their way back to the non-paper. But this will be possible only if jihadis don't provoke a war first.

Many Indian politicians and security analysts continue to call for military action. Some predicted to me that additional jihadi attacks would take place during India's upcoming national election, in May; if such strikes do occur, they said, it would be difficult for India's democratic government to resist public calls for retaliation. For now, however, the decisions belong to Singh, a seventysix-year-old Cambridge-educated economist who recently underwent heartbypass surgery. Singh's decision-making appears to be grounded in military realism; if India were to launch even selective strikes, it would likely only deepen Pakistan's internal turmoil and thus exacerbate the terrorist threat faced by India. Any Indian military action would also risk an escalation that could include nuclear deployments--which may be precisely what the jihadi leaders hoped to provoke. "There is no military option here," Lalit Mansingh, a former Indian Ambassador in Washington, said. India had to "isolate the terrorist elements" in Pakistan, he said, not "rally the nation around them."

Negotiators involved in the secret back channel regarded the effort as politically risky and exceptionally ambitious—a potential turning point in history, as one official put it, comparable to the peace forged between Germany and France after the Second World War. At issue, they believed, was not just a settlement in Kashmir itself but an end to their debilitating covert wars and, eventually, their paranoiac mutual suspicions. They hoped to develop a new regime of free trade and political cooperation in the region, from Central Asia to Bangladesh. On January 8, 2007, at the height of this optimistic interval, Manmohan Singh remarked in public, “I dream of a day, while retaining our respective national identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul.”

These hopes, however quixotic, reflected a competition between two schools of radical thought: the millenarian terrorism of jihadi groups and their supporters; and the less well-known search by sections of the Indian and Pakistani élites for a transformational peace. For both groups, Kashmir is symbolically and ideologically important. It is also, still, a territory of grinding, unfinished war.

Indian paramilitaries had placed Srinagar under an undeclared curfew on the morning this winter when I sought to drive out of the city, which is the summer capital of India’s Jammu and Kashmir state. I wanted to visit a gravedigger in the northern sector of the Kashmir Valley, about fifteen miles from the heavily militarized de-facto border between India and Pakistan known as the Line of Control.

Soldiers in overcoats and olive helmets huddled at checkpoints before open fires; they waved tree branches or batons to stop cars for inspection. The Indian troops on occupation duty in Kashmir—about five hundred thousand soldiers and paramilitaries—rarely speak the Kashmiri dialect. Locals resent them, and they return the attitude. I was travelling with a Kashmiri journalist, Basharat Peer, who is the author of a forthcoming book, “Curfewed Nights,” a coming-of-age narrative set amid the region’s revolts and security crackdowns. Basharat’s press credentials had expired, but he had recently completed a fellowship at Columbia University, and he had his library card; at difficult moments, we thrust it through the window and shouted “New York!,” as if it trumped all rules—and, each time, the soldiers backed off and waved us through.

We passed north, through rice paddies and apple orchards—haunted-looking rows of barren trees. On the horizon rose the snowy ridges of Himalayan foothills. Convoys of troop carriers, water haulers, military tow trucks, and jeeps clogged the highway until we turned down an embankment to the village of Chahal, a hamlet of perhaps a hundred tin-roofed houses among terraced fields beside the Jhelum River.

Kashmiri villagers inhabit a political space confined by roaming guerrillas on one side—some of them local boys, some foreign jihadis from Pakistan—and by Indian troops on the other. At the top of a hill, we found the residue of India’s counter-insurgency campaign: a new concrete school and clinic, constructed by India’s government to appease the villagers, and beside it, encircled by barbed wire, a field of muddy dunes that held the unmarked graves of about two hundred young men whose unidentified bodies had been delivered for burial by the Indian Army.

Just under a thousand graves containing the corpses of unknown young men have been discovered in Kashmir so far by investigators from the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, a small advocacy organization in Srinagar. Last year, a grenade was tossed at the house of the lawyer who advises the group; he and his colleagues have expanded their field surveys nonetheless. They believe that the bodies they have found are among about eight thousand young men who have gone missing during the latest round of Kashmir’s wars; they hypothesize that Indian security forces detained many of the victims in secret prisons, tortured them, and shot them. Indian officials reject these allegations; they have estimated the number of missing Kashmiri men at about four thousand, and speculated that they left for Pakistan for training so that they could fight against India, only to fall in combat when they returned.

In a small stone house, I met Atta Muhammad Khan, a slight man with a trimmed white beard, who is the guardian of Chahal’s tombs of unknown rebels. His work began in the late spring of 2002, he told me, when a Kashmiri policeman arrived in the village with a corpse in a truck. The policeman said that the victim was a Pakistani-supported militant who had been shot dead in battle. “They started bringing bodies every ten days, eight days, fifteen days, at times twice in one day,” Khan said.

Villages such as Chahal that are known to contain such graves have become magnets for Kashmiri families who are looking for missing sons. When family members arrive bearing photographs or other

scraps of evidence, Khan will exhume bodies for them. The gravedigger is himself a searcher; his nephew, whom he raised, disappeared in 2002.

The Kashmir problem has a textbook quality: a dispute of more than six decades' duration, involving British colonial concessions, United Nations resolutions, and a long record of formal negotiations. But it is the character of the war within Kashmir--the torture centers, the unmarked graves, and the remorseless violence of the jihadis--that better describes the contours of Indo- Pakistani enmity today. In one sense, the recent back-channel talks, with their promise of a cleansing peace, have offered each government a path to evade responsibility for the evisceration of Kashmiri villages and families.

India and Pakistan each claims sovereignty in Kashmir, but neither has found a way to control the land or its people. These failures are rooted in what was perhaps Great Britain's greatest imperial crime, the partition of its Indian domain, which ignited violence that claimed about a million lives. In 1947, the British government, bankrupted by the Second World War, hastily completed a plan to divide the subcontinent into the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan. The status of a few territories proved difficult to adjudicate. One was the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, ruled by a Hindu maharaja and largely inhabited by poor Muslim peasants. Under Britain's demographic formula, territories with Muslim majorities were supposed to go to Pakistan, but the maharaja signed an accession agreement to join India. A year later, Pakistan tried to wrest away the territory by sending in a tribal guerrilla force, a gambit that ended in a military stalemate. In a sense, the war of guerrilla infiltration that Pakistan initiated in 1948 has never ended.

In 1972, after their third formal war, India and Pakistan established the Line of Control and deployed artillery and infantry along its length. On the Indian side lay most of Kashmir, as well as the Hindu-majority region of Jammu and the Buddhist-influenced region of Ladakh. On the Pakistani side lay a sliver of land now known as Azad Kashmir and a Himalayan region of Muslim tribes known as the Northern Areas. For almost two decades, a relative calm prevailed, but in late 1989--inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall-- Kashmiris on the Indian side, who were fed up with rigged elections and job discrimination, staged a mass revolt. The I.S.I., which had used Islamist militias during the anti-Soviet campaigns in Afghanistan, reacted opportunistically, by arming those Islamist factions of the rebellion which sought to join Kashmir to Pakistan.

Initially, when Kashmiri Muslim boys from villages such as Chahal sneaked across the Line of Control for weapons and training, I.S.I. officers encouraged them to join a local Islamist guerrilla group known as the Hezbul- Mujahideen, which was affiliated with the international networks of the Muslim Brotherhood. During the late nineties, however, Pakistan shifted much of its support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, which adhered to the Salafi strain of Islamist thought prevalent in Saudi Arabia, and later to a jihadi group called Jaish-e- Mohammed, or the Army of Mohammed. The membership of these secondwave groups came not from Kashmir itself but from the Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, where the suffering of fellow-Muslims in Kashmir is routinely exploited by religious and nationalistic political parties. Lashkar's volunteers collaborated with Hezb-ul- Mujahideen cells, but they weren't fighting and dying in Kashmir because their families had ties to the disputed land; they were there because they believed that God had called them to liberate the region's Muslims from Hindu control.

At least fifty thousand people have died in Kashmir's violence since 1989. The pace of the killing has declined in recent years, but bombings and assassinations persist. Last August, on the highway just above Chahal, Indian paramilitaries shot and killed at least fifteen unarmed protesters marching toward the Line of Control; the shooting touched off yet more street protests. In the satellite- television age, the suffering of Kashmiri civilians has not been broadcast as often or as vividly as that of Palestinians or Lebanese, but on Al Jazeera and on Web sites from Britain to Bangladesh the war has been a major point of grievance. The Indian government has long resisted scrutiny of its human-rights record in Kashmir and deflects blame for the violence onto Pakistan's support for jihadi groups. Special laws shield Indian security forces from accountability for deaths in custody, despite ample evidence that there have been many hundreds of such cases. Even India's urban liberal elite remains in denial about its government's record of torture and extrajudicial killing, Meenakshi Ganguly, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, said. "In the history books, Kashmir is going to be where justice completely failed the promises of Indian democracy," she said.

India's campaign to defeat the jihadis has, in some ways, become subtler and more effective. In 2002, the government held an election in Kashmir, judged locally as fair, which lured fence-sitting separatist Kashmiri politicians into greater cooperation with New Delhi. Last winter, when I visited, India was concluding a second successful regional election, in which Kashmiris turned out in record numbers. One afternoon, on the eve of the final round of voting, I visited the gated home of Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, one of Kashmir's best-known nonviolent separatist leaders. He had been placed under house arrest, so we spoke by cell phone as I sat outside his driveway. Farooq's coalition, called the Hurriyat, had decided to boycott the election, a tactic that now looked like a mistake, since so many Kashmiris had chosen to participate. India has spent large sums on jobs and infrastructure projects, gradually convincing many war-weary civilians and politicians that they can regard regional elections not as a source of sovereign legitimacy for India but as a means to control their local affairs. "We are not in a position to address people's concerns about water, electricity, and jobs," Farooq admitted.

The back-channel negotiations have also helped to quell mainstream Kashmiri separatism. At times secretly and at other times publicly, Musharraf and Singh each began discussions with Hurriyat and other local groups about the terms of an eventual settlement, drawing them in. "Musharraf was someone who was willing to think out of the box," Farooq continued. "It is not an insoluble situation."

As violence has declined, the government has closed the worst of its detention centers. Yet its over-all progress has only clarified for Indian strategists the ongoing failure to stop the I.S.I. from infiltrating jihadi guerrillas across the Line of Control.

One morning after my visit to Chahal, I drove up a pine-tree-lined hill above Srinagar's Dal Lake, past a manicured golf course, to Raj Bhavan, a whitewashed colonial-era estate. I had come to see N. N. Vohra, a white-haired career civil servant who last summer was appointed the governor of Jammu and Kashmir. Imperial histories and biographies lined the bookshelves in Vohra's office; an oil portrait of Mohandas K. Gandhi hung on the wall beside his desk. The Governor told me that "whatever Islamabad may say to the world, and particularly to American leadership," he did not feel that Pakistan had fully dealt with the I.S.I. and its "vested interest in keeping this Kashmir front alive."

Vohra said that when he first arrived as governor he received daily briefings from intelligence officers about interrogation reports, electronic intercepts, and other evidence of I.S.I. activity along the Line of Control. He asked for copies of the raw intercept recordings so he could listen himself. What he heard, he said, was controllers speaking to jihadi commanders inside Kashmir for "twentyfive, thirty minutes" at a time. "And they are very specific, very specific—to go for this target. . . . They said, 'Task No. 1: Eliminate the most senior leaders available.' And they mentioned some—I won't mention the names. And then, 'B, go for the larger rallies of the big leaders-- throw grenades, shoot, bombs, I.E.D.s, whatever.' . . . And the kinds of rewards that are mentioned, rewards that will be given--lifetime, if you bump off a Grade A leader. If you injure them, you get three hundred thousand rupees."

Vohra had doubts about the Pakistan very much hoping in the last four years that they are now progressively seeing the great wisdom and the enormous benefit of not spending all their resources on building up their armies and their armed forces to deal with India-- and to subvert and infiltrate," he said. "There has been a thaw, obviously, quite visibly. The levels of infiltration have gone down. But they haven't given up. And that's the worrying part."

A few days later, I arrived at Wagah, in the Punjab, the primary official land border crossing between India and Pakistan. A winter fog had reduced visibility to a few yards. Five dozen Tata trucks loaded with potatoes and other goods idled in a line facing Pakistan. The border compound has the look of a government park; rows of eucalyptus trees drape manicured lawns. The Indian and Pakistani militaries cooperate at the Wagah crossing. On most days, rival honor guards march and drill on adjoining parade grounds; on Pakistan's side, grandstands have been erected so that spectators can enjoy the show, which has grown into a kind of martial battle of the bands, in which each side strives to excel in the performance categories of goose-stepping and glaring. Only very tall soldiers need apply for duty at Wagah; each country seeks to conjure the illusion that its Army is a legion of giants.

After four cups of tea, several signatures in clothbound ledgers, and some subtle talk of gratuities, two porters carried my bags on their heads to a metal gate. A protocol officer waited inside Pakistan; I had an appointment with Nawaz Sharif, the former Pakistani Prime Minister, who lived nearby, on a family compound outside Lahore. Squads of police guard the Sharif estate, a walled expanse of orchards, wheat fields, and pens filled with deer and peacocks. In the main house, the former Prime Minister

greeted me in a grand reception chamber flanked by two lifesize stuffed lions, and decorated with pink sofas, matching pink Oriental carpets, and gold-plated antelope figurines. He is a rotund, clean-shaven man who, remarkably, retains the youthful look of a person unburdened by stress.

In 1999, less than a year after he authorized Pakistan's nuclear test, Sharif initiated a precursor to the back-channel talks. In February of that year, Sharif invited India's Prime Minister at the time, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to attend a summit in Lahore. The two governments signed a memorandum of understanding; they also commissioned secret, exploratory talks by special emissaries. Sharif designated an aide, Anwar Zahid, and Vajpayee named a journalist, R. K. Mishra. "It was basically on Kashmir," Sharif recalled. "In the early days, we were not really having any consensus on anything. But the mere fact that the back channel was established was a big development. It was doing some serious work."

At the time, Sharif shared power uneasily with Musharraf, whom he had appointed as Chief of Army Staff. Musharraf "found the Lahore summit galling," as Strobe Talbott, who was then the United States' Deputy Secretary of State, put it in a memoir. In these years, Musharraf, "like so many of his fellow officers . . . was a revanchist on the issue of Kashmir." Musharraf apparently decided to break up the peace talks. He authorized a reckless incursion of Army personnel disguised as guerrillas into a mountainous area of Kashmir known as Kargil. A smallscale war erupted; at one point, the Clinton Administration believed that Pakistan's Army had taken steps to mobilize its nuclear weapons. Musharraf has said that he briefed Sharif on the Kargil operation; Sharif denied this. "I think the back channel was making good progress," he told me. "But soon after, you see, it was sabotaged by Mr. Musharraf-- a misadventure that was ill-advised, ill-executed, poorly planned." A few months afterward, Sharif tried to fire the General; Musharraf seized power and threw Sharif in jail. After President Clinton intervened, Sharif was released into exile in Saudi Arabia.

India's leaders initially mistrusted Musharraf because he was the author of Kargil, but gradually, as Mansingh, then India's Ambassador to the United States, recalled, "We found he was a man we could talk to." After 2002, India's economy began to grow more quickly and steadily than at any time since independence; the ranks of its middle-class consumers swelled; and it became possible for Indian strategists to visualize their country rising to become a great power by the mid-twenty-first century. Only a catastrophic war with Pakistan--or Pakistan's collapse into chaos--would stand in the way of India's greatness. "We were convinced these two countries must learn to live in accord--must," Jaswant Singh, who was then India's foreign minister, said.

In time, Musharraf's thinking about India and Kashmir seemed to change, too. Late in 2003, splinter cells from Jaish-e-Mohammed twice tried to assassinate him. "This is what turns him decisively," Maleeha Lodhi, then Pakistan's high commissioner in London, recalled. Just weeks afterward, Musharraf met Vajpayee in Islamabad and agreed to an unprecedented joint statement: the Pakistani President would "not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner." The two leaders announced new formal negotiations between their foreign ministries, which were known as the Composite Dialogue. Privately, they re-started the back-channel talks on Kashmir.

During the next two years, Musharraf delivered India proof of his sincerity. Guerrilla infiltrations into Indian-held territory declined; Pakistani artillery units stopped their salvos on Indian posts, which had been used as cover for infiltrating jihadis. Indian officials concluded that Musharraf--whether by an iron hand or by building a consensus-- had persuaded his senior generals to accept the potential benefits of peace negotiations.

At the landmark meetings he convened at Rawalpindi, Musharraf talked about how a peace settlement might produce economic benefits that could strengthen Pakistan--and its military. The Army had a fifteen-year development plan; the generals knew that the plan would be difficult to pay for without rapid growth. "I was very happy to see how much focus there was on the economy among the Army's officers," Khurshid Kasuri, the former Foreign Minister, recalled.

Mahmud Durrani, a retired major general who was then Musharraf's Ambassador in Washington, said that this new attitude reflected a broader change in outlook. Commanders were asking, he recalled, "Can my economy support me? Can my foreign policy support me? What does the world think of us?"

There was “the feeling that the world is changing and that we have to change,” Khalid Mahmood, who was then Kasuri’s chief of staff, recalled. “It was not easy. There were people who felt that the President has made a U-turn.”

To refine the non-paper, Musharraf relied intuitively on his college friend Tariq Aziz, a civil servant who had made his career in Pakistan’s federal tax department, a bridge enthusiast who seems to some of his colleagues to live precariously on tobacco and adrenaline. Aziz’s Indian counterparts--J. N. Dixit, Singh’s national-security adviser, followed by Satinder Lambah--worked more formally. The Indians typically brought note-takers to the secret hotel sessions overseas, whereas Aziz travelled alone, rarely carried a briefcase, and often had to scribble his notes on hotel stationery. Altogether, there were about two dozen of these hotel sessions between 2004 and early 2007, according to people familiar with them.

The envoys worked on a number of long-standing territorial disputes, including the problem of Siachen, a heavily militarized glacier where Indian and Pakistani soldiers skirmish at heights above twenty thousand feet, battering each other’s snowbound positions with artillery shells. But a Kashmir settlement would be the grand prize.

To outsiders, it has long seemed obvious that the Line of Control should be declared the international border between India and Pakistan--it’s been in place for almost forty years, and each country has built its own institutions behind it. Musharraf, however, made it clear from the start that this would be unacceptable; India was equally firm that it would never renegotiate its borders or the Line of Control. The way out of this impasse, Singh has said, was to “make borders irrelevant,” by allowing for the free movement of people and goods within an autonomous Kashmir region. For Pakistan, this formula might work if it included provisions for the protection--and potential enrichment, through free trade--of the people of Kashmir, in whose name Pakistan had carried on the conflict.

The most recent version of the nonpaper, drafted in early 2007, laid out several principles for a settlement, according to people who have seen the draft or have participated in the discussions about it. Kashmiris would be given special rights to move and trade freely on both sides of the Line of Control. Each of the former princely state’s distinct regions would receive a measure of autonomy--details would be negotiated later. Providing that violence declined, each side would gradually withdraw its troops from the region. At some point, the Line of Control might be acknowledged by both governments as an international border. It is not clear how firm a commitment on a final border the negotiators were prepared to make, or how long it would all take; one person involved suggested a time line of about ten to fifteen years.

One of the most difficult issues involved a plan to establish a joint body, made up of local Kashmiri leaders, Indians, and Pakistanis, to oversee issues that affected populations on both sides of the Line of Control, such as water rights. Pakistan sought something close to shared governance, with the Kashmiris taking a leading role; India, fearing a loss of sovereignty, wanted much less power-sharing. The envoys wrestled intensively over what language to use to describe the scope of this new body; the last draft termed it a “joint mechanism.”

Manmohan Singh’s government feared that successor Pakistani regimes would repudiate any Kashmir bargain forged by Musharraf, who had, after all, come to power in a coup. The Indians were not sure that a provisional peace deal could be protected “from the men of violence--on both sides,” the senior Indian official who was involved recalled. And they wondered whether the Pakistan Army had really embraced the nonpaper framework or merely saw the talks as a ploy to buy time and win favor in Washington while continuing to support the jihadis. “I remember asking Tariq Aziz, ‘Is the Army on board? Right now?’ ” the senior official recalled. “As long as Musharraf was the chief, had the uniform, I think he had a valid answer. He said, ‘Yes, the chief is doing this.’ ”

As the peace talks stalled and Musharraf’s power waned during the first half of 2008, the I.S.I., or sections of it, appeared to be reënlistering jihadi groups. On July 7th, a suicide bomber rammed a car loaded with explosives into the gates of India’s Embassy in Kabul, killing fifty-four people, including the Indian defense attaché. The United States intercepted communications between active I.S.I. personnel and the Taliban-aligned network of Jalaluddin Haqqani, which is believed by U.S. military and intelligence officials to have carried out the Kabul Embassy attack. Haqqani has a long history of collaboration and contact with the I.S.I.; he was also a paid client of the Central Intelligence Agency during the late nineteen-eighties. On September 4th, less than three weeks after Musharraf’s

resignation as Pakistan's President, Kashmiri militant groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba, appeared at a large open rally in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-held Kashmir; the Pakistan Army has a heavy presence in this city, and it is unlikely that such an event could have taken place without the I.S.I.'s sanction. The rally seemed designed to send a message across the Line of Control: Musharraf is gone, but the Kashmir war is alive.

"We asked them specifically, 'How is all this going on if you say the Army's on board?' " the senior Indian official recalled. "They kept saying, 'Give us a chance. We need time. Yes, yes, the Army's on board.' "

In October, Durrani, who was then Pakistan's national-security adviser, travelled to New Delhi and met with members of India's National Security Advisory Board. Indian Army officers presented "some very nice colored charts," as Durrani put it, documenting recent increases in ceasefire violations and jihadi infiltrations along the Line of Control. Durrani found the charts "a bit one-sided," but when he returned to Islamabad he sought explanations about the violations from Pakistan Army commanders. In January, Durrani was fired after making public statements that were seen in Pakistan as too accommo- dating of India.

The apparent revival of the I.S.I.'s covert operations influenced the Singh government's assessment of who was likely responsible for the Mumbai attack. "It appears there has been a change in policy," V. P. Malik, a former Indian Chief of Army Staff, who now heads an influential security-studies institute in New Delhi, said. "They really have not taken action against these outfits, their leaders and their infrastructure."

Pakistan's new civilian President, Asif Zardari, had entered into his own struggle with those in the Pakistani security services who favor the jihadis and covert war against India. Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party has fought the Army for power since the late nineteen-seventies; neither institution fully trusts the other, although they have sometimes collaborated. (Some P.P.P. officials believe that the I.S.I. may have been involved in Benazir Bhutto's murder.) Last May, Zardari tried to assert civilian control over the I.S.I. by placing it under the authority of the Interior Ministry; the Army rejected this order, and Zardari backed down. In November, speaking extemporaneously by video at a conference in New Delhi, Zardari declared that Pakistan might be willing to follow a policy of "no first use" of its nuclear weapons, a remarkable departure from past Pakistan Army doctrine. Privately, in discussions with Indian officials, Zardari affirmed his interest in picking up the back-channel negotiations. Some Indian officials and analysts interpreted Mumbai as a kind of warning from the I.S.I. to Zardari—"Zardari's Kargil," as some Indians put it, meaning that it was a deliberate effort by the Pakistan Army to disrupt Zardari's peace overtures. Several Pakistani and American officials told me that Zardari is now deeply worried about his personal security.

The regional headquarters of Jamaat-ud- Dawa--the educational and charitable organization that, depending on how you see it, is either the parent of or a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba--lies on a flat stretch of agricultural land west of Lahore, outside a village called Muridke. Barbed-wire fences surround a campus of about seventy-five acres, which contains an Olympic-size swimming pool, horse stables, offices, several schools, dormitories, and a large whitewashed mosque. When I visited, a smoky haze had shrouded the facility in a yellowish murk. The chief administrator, Mohammed Abbas, who is also known as Abu Ehsaan, greeted me. Abbas, who is thirty-five years old, has a substantial belly and a four-inch black beard. He showed me inside, to a carpeted room, where we sat cross-legged on the floor, propped against cushions.

The United States listed Jamaat-ud- Dawa--the name roughly translates as the Society of the Call to Islam--as a foreign terrorist organization in 2006, on the ground that it was an alias for Lashkar. After the Mumbai attack, the United Nations Security Council followed suit, with tacit support from Pakistan's civilian government. Abbas told me that these judgments were mistaken, and that Jamaat-ud-Dawa "is solely a relief organization."

He explained that young men often joined the organization as relief workers, and were sent out for a year or more to areas that had been struck by earthquakes or other disasters. These volunteers might also reside at Muridke, where they can receive lodging, food, and pocket money, he said. If they later marry or move into administration, they might qualify for a modest salary. Among the group's projects, he said, "We've set up an emergency cell for accidents on the G.T. Road"--the principal highway that traverses Pakistan. "People call us and we send the ambulance to the scene. We also work in

collaboration with the local district administration. They're happy with our work. They think we're honest--they know that if we pick up victims they will get back all of their valuables when they are released from the hospital."

As we spoke, several full-bearded men spread a plastic mat atop the carpeting and laid out a meal of chicken biryani and naan. Abbas excused himself briefly to answer his cell phone; its ring tone was the sound of a frog croaking.

I asked Abbas if his organization had come under pressure from the government of Pakistan since the Mumbai attack. "The police came the night the organization was banned, but the schools and campus were already closed because of vacations," he said. "It is not clear yet whether the schools will be able to reopen. The hospital is functional, but people are afraid. The number of patients has declined because people are afraid India may hit this Muridke complex.

"No doubt we are afraid," he continued. "Hundreds of workers have been arrested and shifted to unknown places. Top leaders have been placed under house arrest. . . . If they come and they want to arrest me, I am ready. But what is the charge sheet? The U.S. should tell--the U.N. should tell--what Jamaat-ud-Dawa has done."

President Zardari announced that he would ban Jamaat, as required by the U.N. resolution. The Pakistani government plans to close Jamaat's schools and to place provincial administrators at each of the charity's facilities to oversee finances and personnel. However, Pakistan has a long record of implementing such crackdowns only partially, and of releasing jihadi leaders after relatively short periods--an approach to counterterrorism that is referred to in India as "catch and release." Pakistan banned Lashkar in 2002, for example, but its leader, Saeed, continued to preach openly. Indian officials point out that Jamaat's Web site continued to operate long after Pakistan had declared the latest ban, and they claim that Lashkar and Jamaat have now reorganized themselves under various new names.

Abbas took me on a walk around the campus. We chatted with a few young men who said that they were students at Jamaat's university. Lashkar educates thousands annually in a Wahhabi-influenced strain of Islam that, in addition to its political doctrine of transnational jihad, emphasizes austere personal devotion. (Pakistan's traditional religious culture has been influenced by the veneration of earthly Sufi saints.) Evangelizing students form the core of Lashkar's membership and its strength--like Hezbollah, the young men in Jamaat dormitories and "humanitarian" camps can offer social services and a vision of ethical governance in a country that enjoys a paucity of both.

Down a dirt road shaded by eucalyptus trees, we found Jamaat's hospital, where half a dozen villagers squatted on the pavement, waiting for appointments. Inside we toured a gynecological clinic and a dentist's office--the fee schedule posted on the wall indicated that a full dental exam would cost about fifty cents.

A blue police truck had parked in front of the headquarters building by the time we returned. "This happened all of a sudden," Abbas said unhappily. Had my presence been detected, and the police been dispatched to make a show of their vigilance, or was this a genuine inspection? We shook hands and said our farewells beside the police vehicle. On its side, stencilled in English in white block letters, were the words "Crime Forensic Laboratory."

A few minutes later, on the G.T. Road, headed back to Lahore, I passed some Urdu-language graffiti painted prominently in white on a brick wall. "Under the banner of preaching and jihad," the scrawl declared, "Lashkar's caravan will roll on."

Last December, during an appearance on "Meet the Press," Barack Obama remarked, "We can't continue to look at Afghanistan in isolation. We have to see it as part of a regional problem that includes Pakistan, includes India, includes Kashmir, includes Iran." The President has appointed the veteran diplomat Richard Holbrooke as a special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan. The public description of Holbrooke's responsibilities has been carefully worded to avoid explicit mention of Kashmir, because India's government has long rejected outside mediation of that conflict, but, given his mission, Holbrooke will inevitably be drawn into quiet talks about the achievements and frustrations of the back channel.

The Indo-Pakistani equation is critical, in any event, to the outcome of the war in Afghanistan, which Obama has identified as one of his highest foreign-policy priorities. Stability in Afghanistan will be difficult to achieve unless Pakistan cooperates more wholeheartedly in American-led efforts to pacify

the Taliban. The I.S.I. built up the Taliban as a national Afghan movement during the nineteen-nineties, partly as a means to prevent India from gaining influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's generals are unlikely to dismantle the Taliban leadership if they continue to regard jihadi groups as a necessary instrument in an existential struggle with India. "As far as the Pakistan Army is concerned, they think India is trying to weaken Pakistan," Muhammad Nasir Akhtar, a retired three-star general, said. "They also think America is working with India to denuclearize Pakistan." This mind-set, he added, "is very dangerous for the future."

The Mumbai attack took place during the transition between the Bush and Obama Administrations, and the United States concentrated its diplomatic efforts on preventing any armed conflict between India and Pakistan. There were several close calls. Less than seventy-two hours after the attack began, someone pretending to be India's foreign minister telephoned Zardari and threatened war; only when former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice intervened did it become apparent that the call was a hoax. The caller has not been identified; like the Mumbai strike itself, the phony threat may have been a deliberate provocation by jihadi-aligned conspirators.

The danger of open war between India and Pakistan has not passed. As recently as December 26th, Pakistani intelligence officials concluded that Indian warplanes were being positioned for an air raid. The country's national-security adviser at the time, Durrani, telephoned American officials in alarm. The next day, Stephen Hadley, then the national-security adviser, tracked down Durrani on his cell phone while he was shopping in an Islamabad supermarket and told him that there would be no raid.

During the Bush Administration, American and British officials monitored the secret negotiations. British officials contributed a few ideas based on their experience with the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, but neither they nor the Americans became directly involved. Ultimately, any peace settlement between India and Pakistan would have to attract support in both countries' parliaments; if it were seen as a product of American or British meddling, its prospects would be dim. "One of the best pieces of advice we gave the State Department when I was in Delhi-- and I remember writing about four cables on this subject--was to keep hands off," Ashley Tellis, a former political adviser in the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, recalled. "We stayed away, and unless the Obama-ites choose to change this I doubt we will intervene. They've managed quite well without us--they've ended up in a place we'd like to see them end up." Direct negotiations, without mediators, had forced the two sides to confront the hard issues, the senior Indian official told me. "Ultimately, we need to screw up our courage and do the deal, and anybody else getting involved actually gives both of us a crutch," the official said. "We grandstand."

On the fundamental problem of the Pakistan Army's support for jihadi groups, however, only the United States has the leverage, through its military and economic-assistance packages, to insist upon changes. Unless the Pakistan Army makes a true break with its jihadi Clients--and comes to regard these groups as a greater threat than India-- not even the most creative diplomats in the region are likely to succeed. "The time to act--to control the Pakistan Army and get the civilians together--is now," Brajesh Mishra, a former Indian national-security adviser, told me. "I have no doubt in my mind that unless the Pakistan Army is forced to do something about the jihadis it will lead to a military confrontation" with India, and perhaps very soon, he said.

Since November, India has employed a diplomatic and media campaign to induce the international community-- the United States, in particular--to put greater pressure on the Pakistan Army to break its ties with jihadi groups. India and the United States have grown closer in recent years, but Indian officials still see the U.S. as far too willing to accept excuses from Pakistan's generals. "The Pakistanis have been able to play the Americans," C. Uday Bhaskar, a retired Indian Navy commodore, said. "I wouldn't abandon them--that would only make the problem worse. . . . The Pakistan Army will have to self-correct. That is the only way-- short of total war."

In the face of Indian complaints, American officials have sometimes taken a protective posture toward the I.S.I. and the Pakistan Army. Pakistan's generals have become adept at pursuing both peace talks and covert war simultaneously, and at telling American interlocutors what they wish to hear. After September 11th, in particular, the Bush Administration did little to challenge the dualities in Pakistan's policies. Bush's counter-terrorism advisers decided that Kashmir-focussed jihadi groups posed no direct threat to the U.S. The Administration delivered close to ten billion dollars' worth of military aid to Pakistan, ostensibly to fight Al Qaeda, without real oversight and without requiring that the I.S.I. break

with regional Islamist groups. "On Al Qaeda, there was nothing we asked them to do that they wouldn't do," Bob Grenier, who was the C.I.A.'s station chief in Islamabad during 2001 and 2002, recalled. As for groups such as Lashkar, "There was a tremendous amount of ambivalence." I.S.I. leaders seemed "concerned about backlash" if they cracked down too hard on the Kashmir groups, Grenier said.

Last fall, General David Petraeus, a specialist in counter-insurgency doctrine, was promoted to head the United States Central Command, which oversees American military operations and policies in the Middle East, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (India falls under the Pacific Command, thereby complicating efforts to coordinate U.S. military liaisons in the region.) Petraeus has organized a group of about two hundred government, academic, and military specialists to rethink U.S. strategy in his area of responsibility. Their study has highlighted the importance of changing the strategic outlook of Pakistani generals toward India, according to military officers involved in the review. Already, Petraeus has started to expound his "big idea" about U.S. military strategy toward Pakistan: that the Pakistan Army must be convinced that it faces no existential threat from India but does face a revolutionary threat from jihadis within its borders--and so should shift its emphasis from planning and equipping itself for war with India to eliminating homegrown jihadis.

Admiral Mike Mullen became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October, 2007, and since then he has held eight meetings with the Pakistan Army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, as well as three or four meetings with General Ahmad Pasha, who was appointed by Kayani to lead the I.S.I. last autumn. Kayani participated in the back-channel talks while serving as Musharraf's I.S.I. chief; in that role, he endorsed the principles in the non-paper. Both Pakistani commanders have promised a new strategic direction. In January, Pasha told Der Spiegel, "We are distancing ourselves from conflict with India, both now and in general." He added, "We may be crazy in Pakistan, but not completely out of our minds. We know full well that terror is our enemy, not India." Mullen told me that he has heard the same from Kayani and Pasha in private. Their shift in outlook "has been transformational," Mullen said. The Pakistan Army is "certainly committed," and yet, Mullen said, "It's going to take a while, and it's an urgent, urgent situation, where lives are at stake."

The Obama Administration has initiated a sixty-day review of policy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan; as it completes that study, the Administration will have to decide how much patience with the Pakistan Army it can afford. The most difficult challenge will be finding the right blend of encouragement and pressure to induce the Pakistan Army and the I.S.I. to conclude that an overarching and long-lasting regional peace is in their interest. Not all American officials possess even Mullen's qualified optimism. "History shows that the Pakistanis will slow-roll us to death," a senior U.S. intelligence official told me, referring to Pakistan's long record of tolerance for jihadi groups. "The history is so compelling--that the Pakistanis play around and nothing ever changes."

Zardari and Singh may not find it easy to return to the non-paper negotiations on Kashmir any time soon, even if they wish to. In Pakistan, civilian political leaders might well reject the earlier framework simply because the discredited Musharraf was behind it. Even more daunting, the violent contest for power and legitimacy between Taliban militants and Pakistan's government is in many ways a struggle over Pakistan's national identity--and, particularly, over whether the present government is righteously Islamic enough. In the midst of such a contest, any agreement that made concessions to India would be harder than ever to sell to the Pakistani public. "The military is completely on board at the top levels--with a paradigm shift, to see India as an opportunity, to change domestic attitudes," a senior Pakistani official told me. However, he continued, "The public mood is out of synch." The mood within sections of the Army and the I.S.I. may be out of synch with peace negotiations as well; in early February, the Kashmiri jihadi group Hezb-ul- Mujahideen hosted a public conference in Muzaffarabad, which Lashkar supporters attended.

In India, Manmohan Singh seems determined to seek reflection on a peaceand- stability platform. Last year, before Mumbai, Singh took steps to reconnect the back channel with Tariq Aziz, according to people familiar with the diplomacy. Singh was concerned, in particular, about whether Zardari would be willing to continue the talks and whether Pakistan would stand by the non-paper, or insist on renegotiating.

Pervez Musharraf arrived in the United States in January for a speaking tour. It was not a particularly high-profile itinerary; he spoke first to the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan, and later at Stanford University and the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia. On his last evening in the country,

he attended a reception hosted by the Middle East Institute, a public-policy group with headquarters in an Edwardian row house near Dupont Circle, in Washington, D.C. Two men with crewcuts and earpieces stood outside the door; a private security guard with a metal detector checked the guests. Several dozen people sipped red wine in a high-ceilinged room: former American Ambassadors to Pakistan, lobbyists, and representatives of some of the defense contractors who did big business in the Musharraf era, such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. The guest of honor turned up about five minutes late, in a black S.U.V. with flashing emergency lights.

Musharraf looked well, in a tailored dark suit and red tie. He circulated among the crowd and engaged in small talk about the weather, inflected with nostalgia from his time in office--yes, Michigan was very cold, but nothing like the time he stepped onto an airport tarmac in Kazakhstan, when the temperature was minus thirty-six degrees. I asked him about the almost-deal he had made on Kashmir in 2007. I said that I had been surprised to discover how close his negotiators had been to drawing to an end one of the great territorial conflicts of the age.

"I've always believed in peace between India and Pakistan," he replied. "But it required boldness on both sides. . . . What I find lacking sometimes is this boldness-- particularly on the Indian side." He then reviewed a long negotiating session he had had, many years before, with former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, in which the pair had tried and failed to agree on a particular joint statement. As he recounted the incident, the pitch of Musharraf 's voice rose slightly; he seemed to be reliving his frustration.

He returned to the subject of the 2007 talks. "I wasn't just giving concessions-- I was taking from India as well," he said, a touch defensively. Then he calmed. He fixed his gaze and added, "It would have benefitted both India and Pakistan.

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